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The Homeless Heritage of the French Revolution, c.1789-1889

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The first individuals to preserve the French Revolution were the French Revolutionaries themselves. The experience of revolution encouraged many witnesses in the 1790s to hunt down traces of an era that they recognized as both momentous and transient. With the backlash against the Jacobins, these pioneering early collections were scattered abroad and dispersed on the open market. Since nineteenth-century public institutions failed to commemorate the divisive events of the French Revolution, the task of preserving its legacy instead fell to private individuals: militants, tourists, relatives and above all private collectors. This article explores the ways in which revolutionary objects over the following decades were transformed into commodities, personal souvenirs, historical documents, and privileged works of art, as they migrated across multiple 'regimes of value'. It reflects on the necessarily fugitive and homeless nature of the revolutionary heritage, denied any institutional locus for at least a century, and considers the more indirect and subtle ways in which the events of the 1790s remain inscribed within many public and private collections.

Keywords: French Revolution; revolutionary heritage; regimes of value

The Homeless Heritage of the French Revolution, c.1789-1889

The French Revolution had a triple impact on the development of modern conceptions of heritage. The first impact enthroned the state as the guardian of the nation's cultural treasures. The modern notion of heritage, or *patrimoine*, has typically been given Jacobin parentage (Poulot, 1997). By proclaiming a rupture with the *ancien régime*, the revolutionaries made the management and transmission of the past an urgent political conundrum. Whilst some monuments were recognized as offensive to enlightened opinion, pioneering legislation reclaimed the treasures of the church, the crown and the nobility as the birth right of a free and sovereign people (Pommier, 1991). Artefacts that expressed a devotional or dynastic purpose were stripped of their former meanings and converted into documents of the national saga, or into objects of aesthetic contemplation. The French Revolution created not only a set of new tools for evaluating, classifying, inventorying and displaying works of art. It also gave rise to the archetypal modern museum, as one year after the fall of the monarchy, the Louvre, the former residence of the king was opened as the Muséum National in September 1793 (McClellan, 1994). This was followed by the creation of the Archives Nationales in 1794, where the organization of documents reproduced the division between old and new (Pomian, 1992). The state was now the custodian of the *ancien régime*, but had also consigned it to history.

This is a familiar story, whose appeal is subtly related to its contemporary applications. It has recognized French primacy as the elder parent in the international heritage crusade. It has supported the republican belief in education- since only through a critical sifting of the past can its superstitious veneration of its relics be overcome- and it has identified museums as a way of bridging the gap between the scientific

understanding of the past and its popular dissemination. Most strikingly, it has legitimized the professionalization of heritage that reached its apogee during ‘le moment Guizot’ in the 1830s with the introduction of the Commission des Monuments historiques (Poulot, 1988; Bercé, 1979). The result is a genealogy of conservation at once didactic and elitist, technical and state-regulated, and nourished on an idea of French exceptionalism.

Unsurprisingly, those who lament the excessive centralization in French cultural life, have presented this heritage revolution under a different aspect. Jean-Michel Leniaud (2002) has returned to the root of the term *patrimonium* in Roman law as the transmission of family wealth. Leniaud has decoupled the invention of heritage from the single moment of 1789, but stressed the slow growth of the concept of public property over the *longue durée*, visible in changing laws surrounding family inheritance and the inalienable goods of the church. 1789 represented less the birth of a concept, than the emergence of a swollen bureaucracy, which has abrogated for itself the stewardship of historical culture, at the expense of local or independent initiative. Despite the polemical thrust of Leniaud’s interventions, he has reinstated the need to examine the changing boundaries of public and private initiative. This theme has been pursued by Astrid Swenson (2013), whose revisionist, comparative history of the growth of heritage norms in the nineteenth century has dared to query French revolutionary exceptionalism. She has pointed to the striking lag between the Jacobin precedent and the passage of national legislation to protect monuments and landscapes in France, Britain and Germany nearly a century later. In this interval, a central role was played by preservationist societies from across Europe, who pooled their techniques and coordinated their lobbying via conferences and publications. Whilst the terminology and institutions of French Revolution have come to define national heritage, we need to be

wary of mistaking the suddenness, the speed or the political coherence driving this process.

The second impact of 1789 on heritage, and just as significant, was on the stimulus to private ownership. The annexation of certain artworks for public institutions was mirrored by a remarkable alienation of other collections on the open market. Just as the libraries and galleries of dissolved religious orders were auctioned off, so too the chateaux of émigré nobles were ripe pickings for looting or for commercial speculation. Many of the most prestigious aristocratic collectors or *amateurs* of the eighteenth century fell foul of the new authorities, and had their property either confiscated, or sold off at substantially deflated prices (Bailey, 1989). Compared to the patriotic cultivation of the arts pursued under the monarchy, the Revolution has been stereotyped as an era of spoliation and philistine destruction. ‘In less than ten years,’ Michel Beurdeley has argued, ‘France became an immense necropolis of works of art’ (1981, 213).

Vandalisme- the scourge invented and combatted by abbé Grégoire in 1794- was instead made synonymous with the wild excesses of the Jacobins by their nineteenth-century critics. Only recently have scholars been able to nuance these views, cutting through the discursive inflation of the phenomenon, to highlight the specificity of Jacobin policy, which balanced iconoclastic destruction of the few works seen as offensive to republican principles, with a meticulous care of the wider patrimony (Clay, 2013; Bianchi, 2010).

Nonetheless, by prizing so many objects from their former locations and former owners, art historians have acknowledged that this was a foundational moment for the modern art market. The turmoil in France was soon exported across Europe by the revolutionary armies, whose conquests in the Low Countries, along the Rhine and in northern Italy unleashed new cycles of bankruptcy, emigration, secularization and

expropriation. The revolution rendered unprecedented quantities of rare and precious objects newly available, and laid the fortunes of dealers, auction houses and museums right across Europe (Panzanelli, Preti-Hamard, 2007). In particular, thanks to the break-up and sale of the galleries of French princes and émigrés in London- most notably, the sale of the Orléans pictures from the Palais-Royal- the British capital overtook its French sister by 1800 as undisputed capital of the art world (Haskell, 1976; Fredericksen, 2007). 1789 produced two radically divergent traditions: the first that sought to strip art of its provenance and immobilize it within national institutions; the second, that capitalized on an artwork's past history and propelled it into commercial circulation, often far beyond French borders.

The third symptom concerns an appreciation of the heritage of the present. The transformation in historical consciousness unleashed by 1789 can be measured not just in the denial of the past and the rush towards an 'open future', whose strangeness and potential accorded with new 'horizons of expectation'. It can also be grasped in the fascination with the 'mythic present', a unique and unrepeatable moment, whose immediacy was shadowed by an awareness of its retrospective value (Koselleck, 1985; Hunt, 1984). This sensibility was visible in the reflexive commemorations organized by the revolutionaries themselves, who obsessively re-staged in song, dramas and festival the turning-points, struggles and martyrs within the revolutionary epic (Ozouf, 1976; Darlow, 2010). The Jacobins were obsessed with how their example and their beliefs might be transmitted to posterity. Richard Taws has observed, 'Revolutions are forced to do stuff with debris, to sort out and reframe not only the leftover remnants of the regimes they set out to destroy, but the outdated, embarrassing evidence of their earlier selves' (Taws 2013, 1). This continuous act of revision and purification of the revolutionary narrative ensured that different bids to memorialize the revolution

cancelled each other out. The dizzying unstable residency of the famous corpses with the Panthéon- with Mirabeau and Marat ejected only months after their sumptuous burial rites- reflects the difficulty of hitting on any ideologically consensual vision of heritage across the 1790s (Ozouf, 1984).

Moreover, as Taws has explored so imaginatively, the revolutionaries failed in their goal to erect towering structures that would immortalize 1789. Instead much of the material culture of the revolutionary era was ephemeral, eccentric and perishable. For historians, such sources provide exceptional testimony to the revolutionary ambition to infiltrate and re-order everyday life. 1789 was unmistakably a cultural revolution: the collapse of royal censorship and abolition of the print guilds led to a glut of thousands of pamphlets, libels, songs, prints and caricatures, which gleefully scrambled boundaries of genre and propriety (Reichardt and Kohle, 2008). In this process of multi-sensory re-education, the ideals of the revolution were woven into the fabric of intimate life, through furniture, dress, hairstyles and playing cards (Kennedy, 1989; Auslander, 2009; Hunt 1984, 52-119). The banknote known as the *assignat* had first been issued to underwrite the liquidation of the church estates in the autumn of 1789. A product of and a catalyst for revolutionary change, this much-reviled paper currency, in its design, value and evolving iconography, indexed the instabilities of the revolution until it was discontinued in 1796 (Spang, 2015). Many of these pulp products were not made to last. Richard Wrigley has underlined how few Phrygian bonnets or cockades have come down to us, except in a few cases where families carefully conserved these ‘revolutionary relics’ (Wrigley 2002, 13-57).

Despite their documentary value, these objects were deemed artistically worthless in the early nineteenth century, and did nothing to overturn the belief that the revolution represented a black hole for the arts in France. The cultural anarchy

unleashed in 1789 was blamed for desolating the quality of French painting, literature and music. With the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy after 1814, these mementos of revolutionary culture carried the whiff of subversion; they were unwelcome reminders of the painful recent past which the authorities preferred to pass over in 'oubli'. Disdained as aesthetically crude and ideologically repellent, revolutionary artefacts failed to secure an institutional home for most of the nineteenth century. In 1846 Louis-Sébastien Rosaz offered Lyon a collection of nearly one thousand items related to the city's revolutionary history between 1787-1831. Designed to be exhibited in the Hôtel-de-Ville, the acquisition caused disquiet, and curators preferred to hide the revolutionary artefacts away from public view in the reserve. In 1853 the new prefect decided to install the Emperor's apartments within the Hôtel-de-Ville, and so four years later Rosaz's bequest was sold off and dispersed (Barcellini, 2002). Such incidents were especially common when it came to the memory of the most bloodthirsty and divisive of the revolutionaries. François Chèvremont found it impossible in the 1880s to persuade any French museum to acquire the manuscripts and iconography related to Jean-Paul Marat that he had built up over the past thirty years. Having exhausted other avenues, he bequeathed his cabinet to the Trustees of the British Museum in 1898. Henceforth French radicals had no choice but go to London to learn more about 'the life of the man who was banned from the Pantheon in 1794 and from the libraries of republican France a hundred years later' (de Cock 1993, 56 n.3).

The revolution only slowly entered the collections of public museums across the nineteenth century. Instead this was a tradition maintained not through state channels but passed down across generations. For Eugene Weber, 'it hasn't been sufficiently remarked that revolutions were also family affairs, which meant that (like the actors at Oberammergau) you inherited a family tradition that cast you in a certain role, whether

you liked it or not. It was not only on the right that the French had hereditary opinions' (Weber 1988, 160-61). The children of *Conventionnels* played a central role in upholding family memory (Luzzatto, 1991) and with the transmission of tribal political loyalties also came the appetite for relics. Surviving family members- such as Charlotte Robespierre, or Albertine Marat- soon attracted around them souvenir hunters from around Europe. It was thanks to such channels that Alfred de Liesville was able to build up the stockpile of revolutionary objects which he eventually donated to the Musée de la Ville de Paris in 1879 and which ornament today the Musée Carnavalet. But even in the case of Liesville, while he revered the memory of the glory days of 1789, he was a passionate enemy of the Paris Commune, a stray shell from which had nearly detonated inside his home, and had threatened to blow his collections to smithereens. Liesville's donation was motivated less by militancy than by patriotism, seeking to repair the gaps in the metropolitan holdings following the disasters of 1870-71 (Bruson, 2015). In the aftermath of this urban insurrection, many feared that the sight of these old symbols and rallying cries could still be inflammatory.

Scholarship on the heritage of the revolution has pulled in three different directions, with significant methodological implications. The group of scholars interested in the democratization of heritage have invariably been drawn to the study of institutions, and the changing role of the state in the construction of national identities. The second group who emphasize the importance of the market have tended to bypass the national framework to investigate the traffic in objects across borders, as the dispersal and re-distribution of major works of art laid the foundations for the dawning 'museum age'. The third school of scholars have sought to investigate the political culture of the revolutionary era itself as an experiment in popular mobilization and an enduring repertoire of symbols. In isolation, each approach is only partially

illuminating: a narrowly statist model overlooks the contribution of groups inside and outside *l'Hexagone*, and cannot illuminate what happened to those pasts deemed to be unassimilable; by the same token, a concentration on the art market valorises the most prestigious and exceptional artworks, and can slip into narratives of loss and accusations of wilful ignorance; meanwhile, our immensely enriched understanding of why visual and material culture mattered in the 1790s has so far given little guidance as to the reasons for its patchy survival and rediscovery across the nineteenth century. To understand this process, some consideration not just of ideology but physical preservation and transmission is essential (Wahnich, 2013). In his work on the Archives Nationales, Ralph Kingston has argued that very practical, logistical constraints affected the 'material history' of ancien regime documents, just as much as the purge imposed by 'historical terrorism' (Kingston 2001, 19).

For each approach, it would be fruitful to reinsert the figure of the private collector as a central actor in heritage politics. Linking the state, the market and the domestic sphere, these self-appointed amateur custodians developed their own vision of heritage. For the first century after 1789, these men- and they were largely men- formed an underground network whose contribution to the study and the memory of the revolution remains only partially understood. The few surveys of the field reveal they came from a range of occupations, including politicians, lawyers, military veterans and men of letters (Chevalier, 2016). The motivation to collect could be prompted by commercial opportunism, intellectual curiosity or (less commonly than supposed) ideological sympathy. Through their purchases, revolutionary objects were transformed into commodities, personal souvenirs, historical documents, and privileged works of art, as they migrated across multiple 'regimes of value' (Myers, 2001). In what follows only a few dimensions of the post-revolutionary practice can be interrogated- namely

collecting as a mode of knowledge; collecting as a moral mission; and collecting as a political intervention. These interconnected themes clarify why this cohort of scavengers qualify among the first historians of the revolution, an earth-shattering event that supplied them with both rich material pickings and a potent rationale.

Assembling and Appropriating Revolutionary Patrimony

The unprecedented and unpredictable political drama of the 1790s heightened the historical consciousness of a generation, who knew they were living through exceptional times (Fritzsche, 2004). Contemporaries lived the present with a keen, proleptic sense of how their choices and struggles would be judged in centuries hence. The prospectus of the 1797 *Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française* imagined the value of this series of engravings to enlighten future generations: ‘with what eagerness, with what devouring curiosity wouldn’t we search for a similar monument at the time of the Ligue, if there had existed in France then artists capable of transmitting it to us with the same perfection of burin and typography!’ (Hould 2002, 301). The first systematic collectors during the 1790s shared this impulse to create archives for posterity. Thousands of individuals bought revolutionary artefacts out of political conviction, aesthetic impulse, commercial investment or as tactile proofs of what they had seen and participated in. But there were also pioneering attempts to create vast ensembles of sources, even whilst the Revolution was still raging. Philosopher and naturalist Jean-Baptiste Delise de Sales amassed over 2,000 books and 500 newspapers concerning the Revolution, arranged into what he believed was a coherent edifice of documentation (Malandain, 1982). Through such purchases, buyers were free to test or customize their narrative of the Revolution, combining more traditional genres of collecting with the oddities of revolutionary print culture. The 1805 catalogue for the

distinguished medieval scholar Chevalier Méon listed not just vaudevilles, satires, almanacs and 850 caricatures, but also a ‘Collection of all the paper currencies which have been created during the Revolution, from the bank notes of the Caisse d’escompte up to the assignat for 10,000 francs’ (Catalogue 1803, 519). These were mixed-media portfolios stuffed with paper curios and pulp literature, in which the Revolution appeared under many different formats, agendas and guises.

Driving the documentary impulse was the excitement of new historical vistas opening up. This was manifested in the sudden release of vast quantities of records and papers related to feudal institutions and noble families. For just as the revolutionary state created the materiality of the modern archive, it had also represented a windfall for lovers of historical autographs. Architect of a vast library quantity of revolutionary imagery and printed works, Matthieu-Guillaume Villenave had begun his career as a collector from the outset, and was spotted scavenging amidst the ruins of the Bastille (Stammers, 2008b). The strangeness of the Revolution prompted meditations on how far its course had analogies amidst other crises under the monarchy, such as the Fronde or the Wars of Religion. Jacques-Marie Boyer-Brun, author of the first history of caricature in 1792, believed that the savage imagery found in popular prints was a direct inheritor of the propaganda of Luther and Calvin (Duprat, 2004). The hidden scripts within caricatures were to blame for misleading the people, ‘making them hate sovereigns from whom they had only received benefits, and making them forget the saints and the most sacred of their duties by showering the ministers of religion and religion itself with gross ridicule’ (Boyer-Brun 1792, 10). A confirmed royalist, Boyer-Brun was guillotined in 1794, but his pioneering publication matched the seriousness with which the semiotics of popular culture was approached from the 1790s onwards, whether in the analysis of changing fashions or the evolution of coinage (Millin, 1806).

These antiquarians of the modern did not just want to collect the revolution, but to chronicle it and understand its occult significance. Most remarkable was the geologist, ghost-writer of memoirs, defrocked priest and repentant Jacobin politician Jean-Louis Soulavie, who amassed thousands of books, prints, pamphlets, autographs and drawings during the revolutionary decade (Mondin, Jean-Richard, 1989). Taking advantage of his status as both an actor in and witness to the Revolution, he sought out authentic testimonials of key events. He collected drawings from bystanders and anonymous artists of important *journées* or crowd mobilizations, portraits of prisoners during the Terror, and the spectacular execution of key figures (even managing to obtain a dollop of Louis XVI's blood). Such images belonged to the vast iconographic series of over 20,000 prints and drawings that Soulavie assembled and annotated with the seriousness of a Benedictine monk (Stammers, 2016). 'When the fury of times went so far as to destroy the masterpieces of our arts, the tombs of our great men, the churches, abbeys and castles,' he recalled proudly, 'my zeal redoubled to conserve its drawings or its engravings' (Soulavie 1809, vol.2, 435-36). An encyclopaedia on paper, Soulavie's cabinet was intrinsic to his practice as an historian, allowing him to reconstruct the terrifying progress of a revolution which he had come to abhor, and expose its occluded logic.

The fall of Napoleon had coincided with the break-up of a number of important collections, such as that of Soulavie- sold off in 1813 and 1815- and the library of Delisle de Sales. Viewed negatively, these dispersals wrecked the interpretive unity that linked different genres of printed and visual material, and scattered the contents far across Europe. Soulavie's prints and drawings were acquired by Napoleon's stepson Eugène de Beauharnais and followed him into exile in Munich; later they were transferred to St Petersburg, before they were divided up and auctioned off in Paris in

1903 (Soulavie's ex-libris can be found on many fine specimens in British public collections) (Catalogue, 1903-04). Yet out of this effluvia the foundations of new domestic museums were laid, such as that of the retired lawyer in Versailles, François Deschiens, or the 'ethnographic collection' assembled by Colonel Maurin on the rue des Boulangers in Paris. On his visit, doyen of collectors Félix Feuillet de Conches marvelled to find the keys of the Bastille, police dossiers taken from the fortress, letters intercepted from émigrés, not to mention 'the incredible costumes and equally bizarre weapons of the sans-culottes.' Beholding this treasure-trove, Feuillet de Conches remarked that 'it was like the site of the Bastille still smouldering' (Stammers 2008a, 310). These were collections shaped by personal experience, yet which attempted to provide a synthesis of the diverse symbols and slogans of the 1790s. These museums vindicated the belief that quotidian objects, even if crudely and recently produced, offered tangible access to a shared historical epoch (Semmel, 2000).

In this way, the revolutionary era stretched definitions of what was worth being conserved, and generated types of collecting practice. On the one side, there existed the masterpieces produced by artists sympathetic to the Revolution; the post-humous sale of Jacques-Louis David's studio in 1826 included portraits of the revolutionary martyrs Michel Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau and Joseph Bara, as well as the finished drawing of the Tennis Court Oath (the iconic canvas of Marat was listed in the catalogue but was deemed unfit to be sold) (Lee 1999, 317). But there also existed a glut of everyday objects, which had become *souvenirs historiques* through their anecdotal connection with the heroes and villains of the 1790s. This enlarged mission to collect a historical period as a totality, cutting across genres and hierarchies, but organised around key personalities, had informed Alexandre Lenoir's Musée des Monuments Français, and continued to frame assumptions into the Restoration and beyond (Bann 1984, 77-92).

Due to the scandal and revulsion attached to the memory of the Jacobins, the ‘relics’ of the *terroristes* were initially barred from museums and instead entertained voyeuristic crowds at Madame Tussauds in London, and later, the Musée Grévin in Paris (Melman 2006, 29-65; Schwartz 1999, 89-148). The commercial exploitation of the revolution by entrepreneurs and showmen further undermined its legitimacy as a period fit to ornament in public collections; the exception to this rule, the Musée Carnavalet, remains riven by its dual identity as a museum of art and of history (Bordes, 2002).

Democratization in the definition of *what* could be collected was matched by reconceptualization of *who* the collector was and the cultural work he performed. The disarray in the post-revolutionary art market made the salvage of France’s patrimony appear as a moral emergency. This in turn had implications for how the activity of collecting was imagined, as debate raged over whether it was a private luxury or a public good. It is telling that *collectionneur* as a noun first appeared in French in 1829, an alternative to the older word *amateur*, and *collectionner* as a verb was established around 1840 (Biasi 1980, 81). Such terminology had an important regulative function, separating out true discernment from fetish, mania and excess. In contrast to the eighteenth-century *amateur*, whose superior discernment had perished with him on the scaffold, the new breed of nineteenth-century collector was associated with vulgar materialism, as well as a host of personal defects, including eccentricity, monomania, pedantry and a criminal curiosity. Such stereotypes died slowly (Pety, 2001).

Take for example, Henri Boulard, an eminent notary, who stood accused of biblio-bulimia; at the time of his death in 1825 Boulard owned over 555,000 volumes, a library second only to the Bibliothèque du Roi, and which soon broke out the confines of his cramped house and devoured two adjoining properties. Boulard was a prodigious shopper, trawling stalls along the Seine for rarities from 11 until 5. Indeed, he had

specially made pockets sown into his coat to carry the daily cargo. He purchased many forgotten and arcane volumes of arts and science, not from idle curiosity, but ‘with the intention of preventing their destruction’:

It was especially during the course of the revolution, and when the most precious libraries were dispersed by ignorance, that M. Boulard carefully gathered up their debris with a religious respect. Thus his house was open to all classes, to all kinds of *proscrits*, and he devoted a part of his fortune to ensure for his country the conservation of the most noble part of the heritage of its writers and scholars....
(Duviquet, 1828, xx-xxi)

Boulard described the tatty books he found along the river as ‘orphans’ or ‘*proscrits*’ which he felt obliged to provide with shelter- a significant analogy for a man who had provided hiding places to the royalists during the Terror. A figure of fun in the French Restoration, mocked for his prodigious appetites (Nodier, 1831), Boulard was acclaimed by others as a high-minded lover of the French past. Not an individual misfit, Boulard emblemized a wider post-revolutionary type: that semi-mythic *bibliomane* who emerged ‘in reaction against the general decline of the book trades and against the pillage in France of monasteries and of chateaux’ (Barrière 1989, 11-12). Confronted with the material devastation caused by 1789, and the indifference of the authorities, Boulard launched his own one-man heritage crusade. He found inspiration in the learned academies abolished by the revolution but which had passed on the edifying fruit of the French classics. ‘Let us work to create more Mabillons,’ he told fellow bibliophiles, ‘so that there will be fewer Mirabeaus!’ (Boulard 1824, 6). The perceived chaos or disorder introduced into French collections after 1789 found its antidote after 1815 in a project of simultaneous moral and material ‘restoration’.

Viewed in this way, collecting the treasures of the old regime was viewed as a mode of counter-revolution, undoing the vandalism perpetrated by the Jacobins; it is

unsurprising that nineteenth-century collector-antiquarians, from Soulavie and Boulard down to Alexandre Du Sommerard and Charles Sauvageot in the 1830s and 1840s all liked to compare themselves to Alexandre Lenoir and the risks he had taken to safeguard medieval and renaissance masterpieces. The Musée des Monuments created by Lenoir in 1795, and which endured until its dispersal by the Bourbons in 1816, acted as the model for other sanctuaries of gothic art (Stara 2013, 156-60). In contrast to those critics, such as Quatremère de Quincy, who mourned the impoverishment of art when it was ripped from its context, collectors saw such feats of salvage as a civic duty. This was particularly the case in light of the influx of foreign buyers eager to exploit the enduring disorganization of the Parisian trade. To return to the example of books, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (*père*) fumed that due to their carelessness after 1814, French bibliophiles had allowed the English to buy up precious medieval manuscripts and Renaissance rare books in Paris, so that thirty years later they now had to cross the Channel to buy back their patrimony at astronomic costs (Catalogue 1843, 6). Such appeals to patriotic rivalry deflected attention from the complicity of French bibliophiles in supplying Lord Spencer in the first place (Jensen 2011, 32-67). Collectors depended on the Revolution not simply because of the opportunities it afforded for acquisition, but also because it provided a horizon of peril against which collectors could legitimate their own (still mistrusted) activities.

What, though, about the politics of the collection? From previous examples it is already evident that those who did most to safeguard the material culture of the revolution in its immediate aftermath did not share its political values. The largest bloc of revolutionary material in the Bibliothèque Nationale came from the unlikely figure of Noel-Francois-Henri Huchet, comte de la Bédoyère (Fontaine, 2008). Anatole France, who used to play in the count's garden as a boy, was reminded of 'a *gentilhomme* of the

17th century,' an eccentric royalist nobleman who was steeped in Breton Catholicism (France 1870, 257, 261) La Bédoyère had rallied to serve the Bourbons in 1814, and stayed loyal to the dynasty throughout his life- despite Louis XVIII's decision to execute his brother for defecting back to Bonaparte during the Hundred Days. Indeed, La Bédoyère would choose to follow Charles X into exile, and resigned his military command in 1830 rather than break his oath to the Crown. This unimpeachable royalist, and notoriously pernickety bibliophile, avidly swallowed up items formerly owned by Delisle de Sales, Maurin and Deschiens. By 1864, the haul stood at 100,00 pieces, comprising 6,000 pamphlets, posters and *placards*, 4,000 volumes of *procès-verbaux*, memoirs, almanacs, 2,000 different political newspapers and 80 dossiers of autographs, in addition to 4,000 engravings. The entirety was acquired by the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1864 for a price of 90,000 francs (Tourneux 1890-1903, vol.4, xx-xxiii).

Born in 1782, and so slightly younger than those collectors who had come to maturity during the Revolution, La Bédoyère had been jolted into collecting quite by accident, during the course of a tour around the south of France in 1805. He stumbled into a local junk shop and was struck by a pile of mouldering pamphlets. Picking one up at random, he uncovered a 'new world' as he leafed through the strange philosophies of the past decade, and decided to make a systematic collection (France 1862, xii). Once he had found his calling, it took over his life, as he travelled widely and established relationships with booksellers across the continent. He bought with an obsessive, methodical passion:

He took over fifty years to form it, never sparing money nor effort. But let us not be surprised by such constancy and ardour: when the history of the Revolution gets hold of man, he can no longer break free from it, it leads him right to the brink, into the midst of the most terrible events, the most imposing scenes. When we have cast

our eyes upon such prodigious, terrible, unheard of facts, we cannot easily look away: when we have started, we must finish (France, 1862: i-ii).

Or so it seemed to Noel France, Anatole's father, who owned a bookshop on the Quai Malaquais in Paris and specialized in revolutionary ephemera. Charged with producing La Bédoyère's posthumous catalogue, Noel France insisted that while the count had unshakeable principles, he had not allowed his loyalties to cloud his impartial judgement, but fought for 'everything which might be illuminating'. It was this comprehensive, non-partisan quality that earned La Bédoyère's cabinet the status of a 'national and historic monument' (France 1862, xi).

Repulsed by its values, royalists nonetheless made a signal contribution to collecting memorials of the revolution, overcoming their aversion in the pursuit of an objective viewpoint. The route to objectivity entailed playing off discordant texts against each other, and imposing a rigorous classification to draw out the hidden logic of the revolution. This bipartisan, analytic spirit animated the foremost connoisseur of the Revolution in Victorian Britain, John Wilson Croker. Secretary for the Admiralty and Tory MP, Croker visited Paris three times in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Napoleon, and took the lead in 1817 in acquiring a unique tranche of 2,000 pamphlets for the British Museum (Brodhurst, 1976). On subsequent visits Croker tracked down and interviewed survivors, including the unrepentant Albertine Marat. He described the meeting to his wife as 'a glimpse into the infernal regions and an association with spectres which had, as I thought, long vanished from the earth' (Thomas 2000, 193). Thanks to its purchases from Croker's library in 1831 and 1857, the British Library now numbers at least 53,000 pieces within the French revolutionary tracts collection, the only serious rival to the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Despite his unmatched knowledge of the subject, Croker failed to write the great history or encyclopaedia of the Revolution he had mediated upon. He got little further than a volume of occasional essays published in 1857 on the year of his death. In the preface Croker set out the origins and purposes of his library. 'My memory and observation of public affairs are about coeval with that event,' he wrote of 1789. 'I was in my ninth year when the Bastille was taken; it naturally made a great impression on me, and the bloody scenes that so rapidly followed rendered that impression unfavourable' (Croker 1857, v). Croker recognized that the Revolution, his object of study, was inseparable from his own life and politics, although he endeavoured to be 'just' in his assessments:

The early attention which I was led to pay to the Revolution has been actively sustained throughout a long life, and made me a collector (I believe to a much greater extent than any other person in England) of the innumerable pamphlets and periodical and other publications that I may say deluged France as long as anything like freedom of opinion existed, as well as those which were afterwards published under the corrupt and intimidating influence of the successive tyrannies which found little difficulty in converting a licentious and disgraced press into a rigorous and shameless engine of despotism (Croker 1857, vi).

Croker aspired to an even-handed in his treatment of the Revolution, to try and document its positive and its negative aspects with equanimity. Yet he was also indebted to Edmund Burke in his overall vision of the revolution as a tyranny licensed by an appeal to the mob and maintained through the debasement of public opinion. He wrote of his pamphlets:

These publications, however ephemeral in interest or apocryphal as authorities, are still valuable and important as contemporaneous evidence, both positive and negative, for what they tell and what they do not are often as instructive in their falsehood as in their truth. From my acquaintance, imperfect as it may be, with this enormous mass of documents I am satisfied that no accurate idea of the real springs

and interior workings of the great revolutionary machine can be formed without a deeper and more diligent examination than any historian I have read appears to have made of them (Croker 1857, vi).

Croker recognized that preserving the falsehoods and delusions entertained by the revolutionaries was essential to understanding their behaviour, and to grasping their sometimes unwitting role in the unfolding conspiracy.

Croker's passion underlines the transnational nature of revolutionary preservation. In the 1850s exiled republican and budding historian Louis Blanc was surprised and delighted to find so many rare publications housed in London (at that point, before the purchase of La Bédoyère's materials, far richer than the holdings in Paris). The national collections in Britain and France existed thanks to the work of gentleman bibliophiles, many of whom were critical if not downright hostile to 1789. This recuperation or co-option of the revolution by the conservative elite was significant, since these aristocrats were responsible for imposing classifications on their items that were then reproduced within national museums. Take the Belgian-born father and son bibliophiles, the De Vinck family, who from the 1850s began systematically amassing revolutionary imagery. Eugène de Vinck produced a pioneering monograph dedicated to studying the imagery surrounding the execution of Louis XVI- described as 'the murder of the 21st January 1793'- in which he blamed the act of regicide for all the subsequent 'cataclysms' and 'punishments' inflicted on France (de Vinck 1877, 171-72). Donated to the Bibliothèque Nationale in several phases after 1906, the Vincks' astonishingly rich print collections still form the standard repertoire for scholars today. Yet it had a clear ideological agenda too. The Vincks entitled their iconographic series a 'Century of French History in Prints, 1770-1871', and these dates are significant. It began in 1770 with the arrival of Marie-Antoinette as dauphine in France, and images of her suffering and apotheosis remains the symbolic centrepiece of the

series; it ended in 1871 with the outrages of the Commune, when old, monarchical France finally died (Bruehl, 1909). Modern cataloguing and digitization of the *fonds* have disguised some of the anti-revolutionary meanings imparted by its first proprietors.

The Legacies of Revolutionary Collecting

Swapping state-centred perspectives for amateur initiatives clarifies the channels by which the Revolution reshaped the idea and practice of heritage. Taking a broad view, while 1789 deserves its place in a genealogy of the nationalization of cultural heritage, it is also true that the Revolution enabled and legitimized private collecting in the early nineteenth century, confirming its potential as a mode of comprehending, and possibly undoing, the same destructive and centrifugal forces that the Revolution had unleashed. The revolutionary generation were among the first to feel the historicity of the contemporary, an insight reinforced in the subsequent uprisings in 1830, 1848 and 1871. Yet although Jacobins like abbé Grégoire pioneered the state protection of national monuments in 1794, this protection was not afforded to revolutionary culture for well over a century. Instead it fell to private individuals, some of them non-French nationals, and many of them conservative by disposition, to stockpile these homeless artefacts. In the process these collectors were able to control their visibility and their interpretation. Studying these elite collectors and donors allows us to grasp the slow process by which 1789 was finally captured, consumed and even decontaminated within public institutions.

With the end of the Cold War and the crises of legitimacy confronting the Fifth Republic, what constitutes the legacy of 1789 remains a live issue today. Ever since the Bicentenary, the intangible heritage of the Revolution as a credo of liberty has been eloquently defended (Aguilhon, 1989; Vovelle, 2007). New efforts to exhibit the material heritage of 1789 have been contentious. Hopes for creating a permanent

museum of the revolution in Paris unravelled, and the flashy temporary exhibition mounted in the Tuileries in 1989 was roundly condemned as a *débâcle* for its superficiality (Kaplan 1995, 255). Far more successful was the Musée de la Révolution française in Vizille, which first opened its doors on 14 July 1984. One of its early directors, Philippe Bordes, recognized that it was a necessarily politicized site, which had to acknowledge the dynamic process of interpretation. The galleries at Vizille aimed less at giving an authoritative panorama of the revolution, than at foregrounding debate, and ‘clarifying the stakes which inform its existence.’ Bordes envisioned a space which was neither a plain history museum, nor a museum of fine-arts, but played the values of history and aesthetics dialectically off against each other. Vizille bought into the ‘heritage paradigm’ only insofar as it could turn it to critical ends, conferring a new prestige on the abundant cultural products of the 1790s: ‘to those who think the revolutionaries were vandals and if you like, that they spent their time cutting off heads, they [the collections] reply: the revolutionaries painted canvases, modelled sculptures, decorated pottery etc’ (Bordes 1992, 299, 308). Despite decades of rehabilitation, the curators at Vizille still felt it necessary to advocate for the creativity of the revolutionary era, rebutting long-held assumptions about its sterility or mediocrity. For them, a revolutionary museum must be *sui generis*, and burst the confines of conventional display to engage its visitors in an ongoing conversation.

The galleries at Vizille pay belated homage to the revolutionary generation, whose values did so much to create transparent and accessible public institutions in the 1790s- such as the Louvre, the Archives Nationales, Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle- but whose symbols and artworks remained marginalized and elusive within the cultural sphere. For most of the nineteenth century, the revolutionary *form* or *metaphor* of the museum was accepted more readily than any possible revolutionary contents

(McClellan, 1988). In a rare instance where revolutionary artefacts still inhabit a revolutionary space- such as the perforated spheres in wood and ivory created by François Barreau, and located in the 1794 Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers- the effect today is jarringly surreal, with Barreau's futuristic, functionless objects appearing 'anachronistic' and 'outmoded' in a museum dedicated to technical progress (Taws 2009, 265). Long denied entry to public collections, revolutionary artworks continue to surface on the open market. The spectacular sale of the comte de Paris in 2015 was a reminder that objects with a revolutionary provenance still represent big business. Each of these sales can extend our knowledge not just about art and artists, but the original ensembles from which these objects have derived. The 'Revolution' themed sale at Christie's, New York, in April 2016 featured a preparatory study by François-André Vincent for his 1796 painting 'L'Agriculture'; thanks to the seal on the back, we can see it belonged previously to Henri Huchet de la Bédoyère (Christie's 2016, no.14). In unexpected and sometimes unnoticed ways, the aesthetic choices of the first generation of collectors continue to prescribe the scope on the market today. Their names have themselves become collectible, adding cachet to their possessions, and providing an assurance of quality amidst the debris of democratic culture. In their vexed fears for posterity, the Jacobins probably never considered that their legacy would be entrusted to and maintained by their counter-revolutionary enemies. If this example suggests the cunning of reason, it also reminds us that the immortality of revolutions hinges as much on their foes as on their friends.

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